

Operation Mockingbird

Operation Mockingbird was a secret campaign by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to influence media. Begun in the 1950s, it was initially organized by Cord Meyer and Allen W. Dulles, and was later led by Frank Wisner after Dulles became the head of the CIA. The organization recruited leading American journalists into a network to help present the CIA's views, and funded some student and cultural organizations, and magazines as fronts. As it developed, it also worked to influence foreign media and political campaigns, in addition to activities by other operating units of the CIA.

In addition to earlier exposés of CIA activities in foreign affairs, in 1966 *Ramparts* magazine published an article revealing that the National Student Association was funded by the CIA. The United States Congress investigated, and published its report in 1976. Other accounts were also published. The media operation was first called Mockingbird in Deborah Davis's 1979 book, *Katharine the Great: Katharine Graham and her Washington Post Empire*.

1 History

In 1948, Frank Wisner was appointed director of the Office of Special Projects (OSP). Soon afterwards OSP was renamed the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC). This became the covert action branch of the Central Intelligence Agency. Wisner was told to create an organization that concentrated on "propaganda, economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance groups, and support of indigenous anti-Communist elements in threatened countries of the free world."^[1] Later that year Wisner established Mockingbird, a program to influence foreign media. Wisner recruited Philip Graham from *The Washington Post* to run the project within the industry. According to Deborah Davis in *Katharine the Great*; "By the early 1950s, Wisner 'owned' respected members of *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, CBS and other communications vehicles."^[2]

In 1951, Allen W. Dulles persuaded Cord Meyer to join the CIA. However, there is evidence that he was recruited several years earlier and had been spying on the liberal internationalist organizations he had been a member of in the late 1940s.^[3] According to Deborah Davis, Meyer became Mockingbird's "principal operative."^[4]

After 1953, the network was overseen by Allen W. Dulles, director of the CIA. By this time, Operation Mockingbird had a major influence over 25 newspapers and wire agencies. The usual methodology was placing reports developed from intelligence provided by the CIA to witting or unwitting reporters. Those reports would then be repeated or cited by the preceding reporters which in turn would then be cited throughout the media wire services. These networks were run by people with well-known liberal but pro-American big business and anti-Soviet views such as William S. Paley (CBS), Henry Luce (*Time* and *Life Magazine*), Arthur Hays Sulzberger (*New York Times*), Alfred Friendly (managing editor of the *Washington Post*), Jerry O'Leary (*Washington Star*), Hal Hendrix (*Miami News*), Barry Bingham, Sr. (*Louisville Courier-Journal*), James Copley (Copley News Services) and Joseph Harrison (*Christian Science Monitor*).^[6]

The Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) was funded by siphoning off funds intended for the Marshall Plan. Some of this money was used to bribe journalists and publishers. Frank Wisner was constantly looking for ways to help convince the public of the dangers of Soviet communism. In 1954, Wisner arranged for the funding of the Hollywood production of *Animal Farm*, the animated allegory based on the book written by George Orwell.^[7]

According to Alex Constantine (*Mockingbird: The Subversion of the Free Press by the CIA*, first chapter of *Virtual Government: CIA Mind Control Operations in America*, p. 42), in the 1950s, "some 3,000 salaried and contract CIA employees were eventually engaged in propaganda efforts". Wisner was able to constrain newspapers from reporting about certain events, including the CIA plots to overthrow the governments of Iran (see: Operation Ajax) and Guatemala (see: Operation PBSUCCESS).^[8]

Thomas Braden, head of the International Organizations Division (IOD), played an important role in Operation Mockingbird. Many years later he revealed his role in these events:

"If the director of CIA wanted to extend a present, say, to someone in Europe—a Labour leader—suppose he just thought, This man can use fifty thousand dollars, he's working well and doing a good job - he could hand it to him and never have to account to anybody... There was simply no limit to the money it could spend and no limit to the people it could hire and no

limit to the activities it could decide were necessary to conduct the war—the secret war... It was a multinational. Maybe it was one of the first. Journalists were a target, labor unions a particular target—that was one of the activities in which the communists spent the most money.”^[9]

1.1 Directorate for Plans

In August 1952, the Office of Policy Coordination which dealt with covert-action such as paramilitary or psychological influence operations, and the Office of Special Operations which dealt with espionage and counter-espionage, were merged under the Deputy Director for Plans (DDP), Allen W. Dulles. When Dulles became head of the CIA in 1953, Frank Wisner became head of this new organization and Richard Helms became his chief of operations. Mockingbird became the responsibility of the DDP.^[10]

J. Edgar Hoover became jealous of the CIA’s growing power. Institutionally, the organizations were very different, with the CIA holding a more politically diverse group in contrast to the more conservative FBI. This was reflected in Hoover’s description of the OPC as “Wisner’s gang of weirdos”. Hoover began having investigations done into Wisner’s people. He found that some of them had been active in left-wing politics in the 1930s. This information was passed to Senator Joseph McCarthy who started making attacks on members of the OPC. Hoover also gave McCarthy details of an affair that Frank Wisner had with Princess Caradja in Romania during the war. Hoover claimed that Caradja was a Soviet agent.^[11]

McCarthy, as part of his campaign against government, began accusing other senior members of the CIA as being security risks. McCarthy claimed that the CIA was a “sinkhole of communists”, and said he would root out a hundred of them. One of his first targets was Cord Meyer, who was still working for Operation Mockingbird. In August 1953, Richard Helms, Wisner’s deputy at the OPC, told Meyer that McCarthy had accused him of being a communist. The Federal Bureau of Investigation said it was unwilling to give Meyer “security clearance,” without referring to any evidence against him. Allen W. Dulles and Frank Wisner both came to his defense and refused to permit an FBI interrogation of Meyer.^[12]

With the network in authority in the CIA threatened, Wisner was directed to unleash Mockingbird on McCarthy. Drew Pearson, Joe Alsop, Jack Anderson, Walter Lippmann and Ed Murrow all engaged in intensely negative coverage of McCarthy. According to Jack Anderson, his political reputation was permanently damaged by the press coverage orchestrated by Wisner.^[13]

1.2 Guatemala

Mockingbird was very active during the overthrow of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in Guatemala during Operation PBSUCCESS. Dulles restrained certain journalists from traveling to Guatemala, including Sydney Gruson of the *New York Times*.^[14] As the CIA’s wealth and power increased, its aggressive focus toward the Soviet Union soon began not only heating up the Cold War but also in disrupting relations with America’s European allies. They considered rising third-world liberationist movements as potential threats to their political systems.

Consequently, even in the wake of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’s 1952 presidential campaign pledge to “roll back the Iron Curtain,” American covert action operations came under scrutiny almost as soon as Dwight Eisenhower was inaugurated in 1953. He soon set up an evaluation operation called Solarium, which had three committees playing analytical games to see which plans of action should be continued. In 1955, President Eisenhower established the 5412 Committee in order to keep more of a check on the CIA’s covert activities. The committee (also called the Special Group) included the CIA director, the national security adviser, and the deputy secretaries at State and Defense. They were to determine whether covert actions were “proper” and in the national interest. Richard B. Russell, chairman of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee was also included in the group. As Allen W. Dulles was later to admit, because of “plausible deniability,” CIA-planned covert actions were not referred to the 5412 Committee for review.

Ultimately, Eisenhower became concerned that CIA covert activities were being poorly coordinated with American foreign policy. He thought they may have expressed senior corporate interests of upper-class families of the North-Eastern Establishment. In 1956 he appointed David K. E. Bruce as a member of the President’s Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities (PBCFIA). Eisenhower asked Bruce to write a report on the CIA. It was presented to Eisenhower on 20 December 1956. Bruce argued that the CIA’s covert actions were “responsible in great measure for stirring up the turmoil and raising the doubts about us that exists in many countries in the world today.”^[15]

Bruce was also highly critical of Mockingbird. He argued: “what right have we to go barging around in other countries buying newspapers and handing money to opposition parties or supporting a candidate for this, that, or the other office.”^[15]

After Richard M. Bissell, Jr. lost his post as Deputy Director for Plans in 1962, Tracy Barnes took over the running of Mockingbird. According to Evan Thomas in his book, *The Very Best Men* (1995), Barnes planted editorials about political candidates who were regarded as pro-CIA.

1.3 First exposure

In 1964, Random House published *Invisible Government* by David Wise and Thomas Ross. The book exposed the role of the CIA in foreign policy. This included CIA coups in Guatemala (Operation PBSUCCESS) and Iran (Operation Ajax) and the Bay of Pigs Invasion. It also revealed the CIA's attempts to overthrow President Sukarno in Indonesia and the covert operations taking place in Laos and Vietnam. The CIA considered buying up the entire printing of *Invisible Government* but this idea was rejected when Random House pointed out that if this happened they would have to print a second edition.^[1]

John McCone, the new director of the CIA, tried to prevent Edward Yates from making a documentary on the CIA for the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). This attempt at censorship failed, and NBC broadcast this critical documentary.

In June 1965, Desmond FitzGerald was appointed as head of the Directorate for Plans. He took charge of Mockingbird. At the end of 1966, FitzGerald learned that *Ramparts*, another CIA backed left-wing publication, had discovered that the CIA had been secretly funding the National Student Association and was considering publishing an account.^[16] When the magazine advised the CIA it had "lost control of the information," and would likely be forced to publicize, FitzGerald ordered a plan to either neutralize the campaign and/or wind-down Mockingbird.

He appointed Edgar Applewhite to organize a campaign against *Ramparts*. Applewhite later told Evan Thomas for his book, *The Very Best Men*: "I had all sorts of dirty tricks to hurt their circulation and financing. The people running *Ramparts* were vulnerable to blackmail. We had awful things in mind, some of which we carried off."^[17]

Ramparts publishing the account in March 1967. The article, written by Sol Stern, was entitled *NSA and the CIA*. As well as reporting CIA funding of the National Student Association, Stern exposed the wide system of anti-Communist front organizations in Europe, Asia, and South America. It named Cord Meyer as a key figure in this campaign, which included the funding of the literary journal *Encounter*.^[9] Applewhite managed to control some of the account by steering references away from leftist organizations and toward most of the few conservative organizations backed by the CIA. Those organizations named in the article were not ones that could not be linked to *Ramparts*, itself a CIA proprietary organization.

In May 1967, Thomas Braden published "I'm Glad the CIA is Immoral", in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He defended the activities of the International Organizations Division unit of the CIA. Braden said that the CIA had kept these activities secret from Congress. As he wrote: "In the early 1950s, when the Cold War was really hot, the idea that Congress would have approved many of our projects was about as likely as the John Birch Society's

approving Medicare."^[18]

Meyer's role in Operation Mockingbird was further revealed in 1972 when he was accused of interfering with the publication of a book, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* by Alfred W. McCoy. The book was highly critical of the CIA's dealings with the drug traffic in Southeast Asia, especially in its critique toward how the agency subverted French control of the opium trade. The publisher, who leaked the story, had been a former colleague of Meyer's when he was a liberal activist after the war.^[19]

1.4 Church Committee investigations

Further details of Operation Mockingbird were revealed as a result of the Senator Frank Church investigations (Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities) in 1975. According to the Congress report published in 1976:

"The CIA currently maintains a network of several hundred foreign individuals around the world who provide intelligence for the CIA and at times attempt to influence opinion through the use of covert propaganda. These individuals provide the CIA with direct access to a large number of newspapers and periodicals, scores of press services and news agencies, radio and television stations, commercial book publishers, and other foreign media outlets."

Church argued that misinforming the world cost American taxpayers an estimated \$265 million a year.^[20]

In February 1976, George H. W. Bush, the recently appointed Director of the CIA, announced a new policy: "Effective immediately, the CIA will not enter into any paid or contract relationship with any full-time or part-time news correspondent accredited by any U.S. news service, newspaper, periodical, radio or television network or station." He added that the CIA would continue to "welcome" the voluntary, unpaid cooperation of journalists.^[21]

1.5 "Family Jewels" report

According to the "Family Jewels" report, released by the National Security Archive on June 26, 2007, during the period from March 12, 1963 and June 15, 1963, the CIA installed telephone taps on two Washington-based news reporters.

2 See also

- Judith Miller

- Propaganda in the United States
- Radio Liberty
- James Risen
- Robertson Panel
- White propaganda
- Special Activities Division

3 Further reading

- *Katharine the Great: Katharine Graham and the Washington Post* by Deborah Davis, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979. This book makes many claims about Katharine Graham, then owner of the *Washington Post*, and her cooperation with Operation Mockingbird.
- Wilford, Hugh (2008). *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. ISBN 978-0-674-02681-0.

4 References

- [1] David Wise and Thomas Ross (1964). *Invisible Government*.
- [2] Deborah Davis (1979). *Katharine the Great*. pp. 137–138.
- [3] Cord Meyer (1980). *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA*. pp. 42–59.
- [4] Deborah Davis (1979). *Katharine the Great*. p. 226.
- [5] Carl Bernstein, *CIA and the Media*, People, 1977
- [6] Carl Bernstein (20 October 1977). “CIA and the Media”. *Rolling Stone Magazine*.
- [7] Evan Thomas (1995). *The Very Best Men: The Early Years of the CIA*. p. 33.
- [8] Alex Constantine (1997). *Virtual Government: CIA Mind Control Operations in America*. Feral House. ISBN 9780922915453.
- [9] Thomas Braden, interview included in the Granada Television program, *World in Action: The Rise and Fall of the CIA*. 1975.
- [10] John Ranelagh (1986). *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA*. pp. 198–202.
- [11] Evan Thomas (1995). *The Very Best Men: The Early Years of the CIA*. pp. 98–106.
- [12] Cord Meyer (1980). *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA*. pp. 60–84.
- [13] Jack Anderson (1979). *Confessions of a Muckraker*. pp. 208–236.
- [14] Evan Thomas (1995). *The Very Best Men: The Early Years of the CIA*. p. 117.
- [15] Evan Thomas (1995). *The Very Best Men: The Early Years of the CIA*. pp. 148–150.
- [16] Cord Meyer (1980). *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA*. pp. 86–89.
- [17] Evan Thomas (1995). *The Very Best Men: The Early Years of the CIA*. p. 330.
- [18] Thomas Braden (20 May 1967). “I’m Glad the CIA is ‘Immoral’”. *Saturday Evening Post*.
- [19] Nina Burleigh (1998). *A Very Private Woman*. p. 105.
- [20] *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities*. April 1976. pp. 191–201.
- [21] Mary Louise (2003). *Mockingbird: CIA Media Manipulation*.

5 External links

- Carl Bernstein’s 1977 article for Rolling Stone “The CIA and the Media”
- CIA “Family Jewels” Report

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